HUNTING ISLAND

STATE PARK VISITORS GUIDE

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Hunting Island State Park Visitor's Guide

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Division of State Parks
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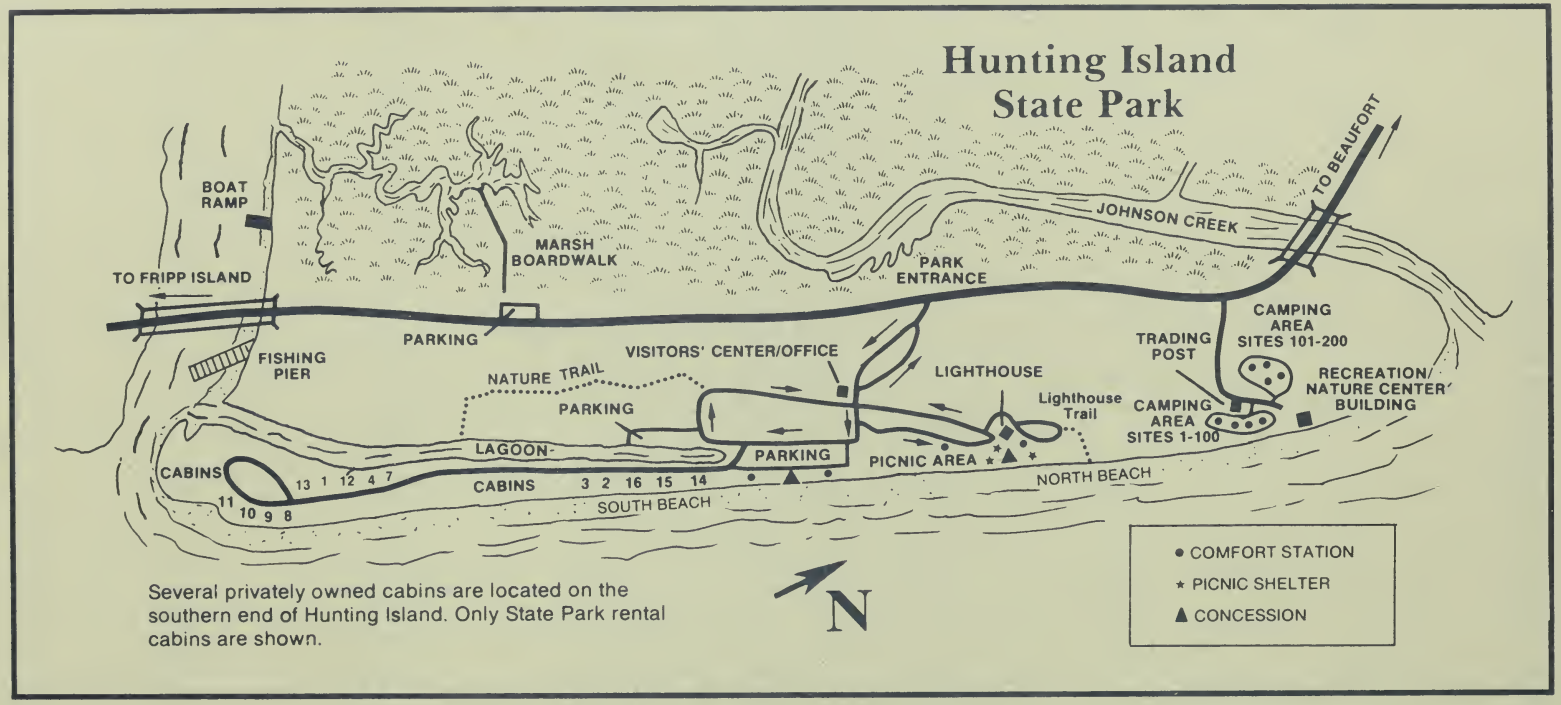
James Cook, Map of South Carolina, 1773 and Robert Mills, Map of Beaufort District, 1861 courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Plat:

Reynolds' Island, 1761 courtesy of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.



Several privately owned cabins are located on the southern end of Hunting Island. Only State Park rental cabins are shown.

INTRODUCTION

Hunting Island State Park, one of South Carolina's most popular parks, was acquired from Beaufort County in 1938. Approximately four miles long and one mile wide, the park encompasses 5,000 acres of saltwater marsh, maritime forest and sandy beach.

The island got its name because it was once used for hunting deer, raccoon and other small game and waterfowl. Today this large barrier island offers refuge to these creatures, and still retains much of its semi-tropical beauty. Development plans have been guided by an attempt to protect this significant habitat. Roads and parking areas have been located to avoid fragile areas and to minimize impact.

Hunting Island possesses the best developed slash pine/palmetto forest in the state and is one of the best sites to observe South Carolina's state tree, the cabbage palmetto, in its natural habitat. With more than four miles of beach, the maritime forest, a saltwater lagoon and extensive salt marsh, the island has great appeal for nature lovers. White-tailed deer and raccoon are abundant and frequently observed by park visitors. More than 170 species of birds have been reported from the park including significant numbers of herons, egrets, gulls and terns. Hunting Island is a true nature lover's paradise.

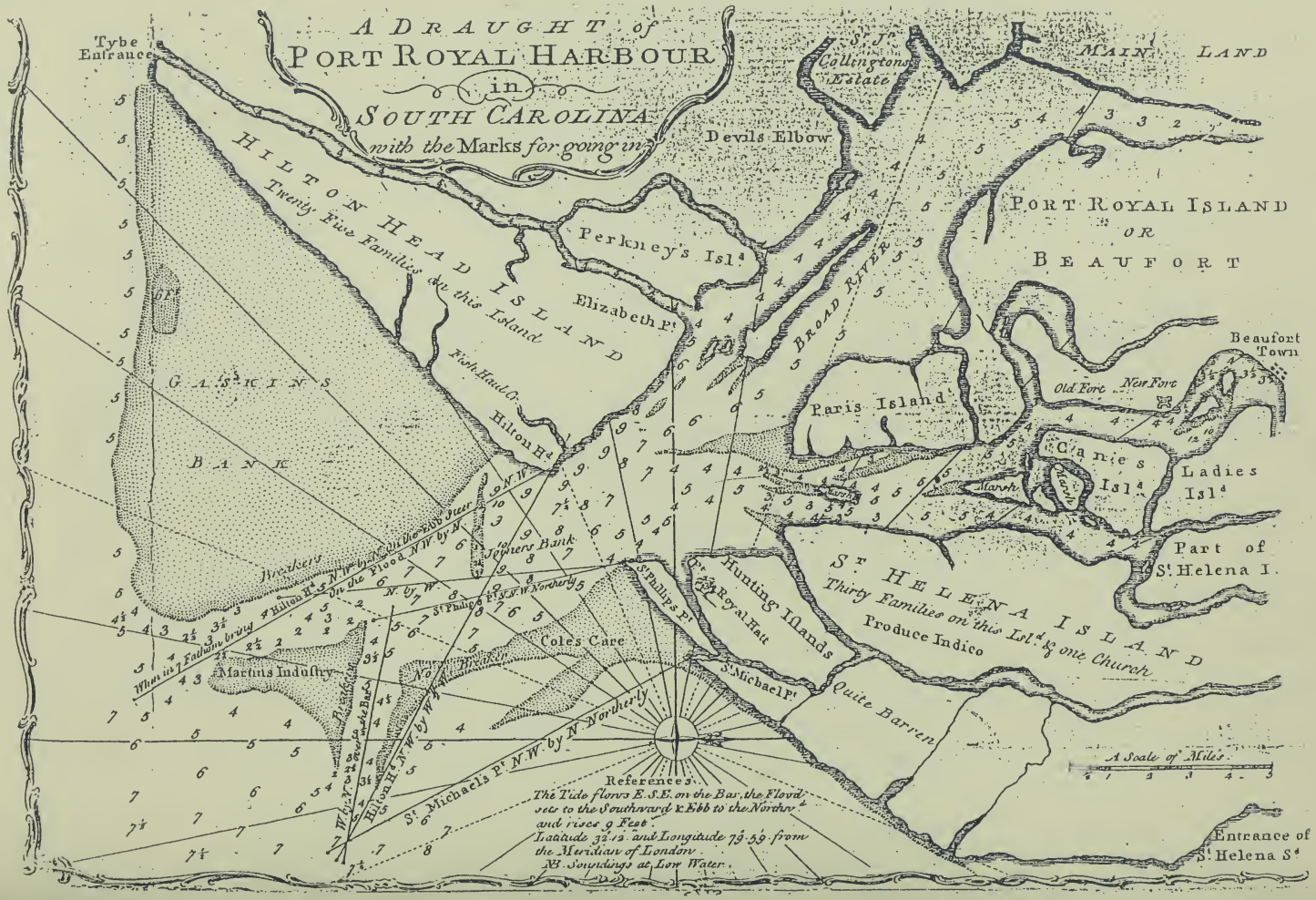
The interpretive center/office complex is located near the entrance to the day-use and cabin areas of the park. This building contains the park administrative offices and serves as the primary visitor information center. Also housed in the building are exhibits of the cultural and natural history of the area.

Walking trails offer unique opportunities for visitors to experience the natural beauty of the island. These trails provide the opportunity for short or extended trips through the park's maritime forest dominated by live oaks, slash pine and cabbage palmettos. Along the trails lsaw palmetto thickets and the remnants of old sand dunes, now stabilized by forest vegetation can be observed.

The most popular trail on Hunting Island is the Garden Hammock trail. Located off Highway 21 near the bridge to Fripp Island, this 0.3 mile National Recreation Trail contains a boardwalk that spans a portion of the Hunting Island salt marsh leading to Garden Hammock. From the Garden Hammock, a series of trails and boardwalks lead to a crabbing dock along a tidal creek. This trail allows visitors the opportunity to see smooth cordgrass, Atlantic ribbed mussels, fiddler crabs and wharf crabs.

Fishing remains a popular pastime along South Carolina's coast. Hunting Island provides anglers an excellent opportunity for large catches of whiting, spot, seatrout, seabass and drum. Fishermen can test their skill and luck in the surf, in the lagoon which can be accessed through the park's main entrance or at the park's 1120 foot fishing pier located near the bridge to Fripp Island. Bait, fishing gear, food and souvenirs can be purchased at the tackle shop located at the pier entrance.

To explore the miles of salt marsh or to fish just offshore, Beaufort County maintains a public boat ramp at Russ Point on the south end of Hunting Island. This ramp extends into the deep water of Fripp Inlet and is accessible at both high and low tides. To reach the ramp, turn right at the end of Highway 21 just before the Fripp Island bridge.


A DRAUGHT of
PORT ROYAL HARBOUR
in
SOUTH CAROLINA
with the Marks for going in
Tybe Entrance
HILTON HEAD ISLAND
Twenty Five Families on this Island
GASKINS
BANK
Perkney's Isl.d
Elizabeth P.t
Fish Haul C.
Hilton H.d
Devils Elbow
Sr. Jno. Collingtons Estate
MAIN LAND
PORT ROYAL ISLAND
OR
BEAUFORT
BROAD RIVER
Paris Island
Beaufort Town
Old Fort
New Fort
Canies Isl.d
Marsh
Ladies Isl.d
Part of St. Helena I.
Jeffreys Bank
Coles Care
Martins Industry
Hunting Islands
Royal Halt
St. Phillips P.t
St. Michael P.t
Quite Barren
ST HELENA ISLAND
Thirty Families on this Isl.d & one Church
Produce Indico
A Scale of Miles
References
The Tide flows E.S.E. on the Bar, the Flood sets to the Southward & Ebb to the Northward and rises 9 Feet
Latitude 32.15 and Longitude 79.59 from the Meridian of London
NB. Soundings at Low Water
Entrance of St. Helena S.d

HISTORIC FEATURES OF HUNTING ISLAND

Hunting Island -- An Historic Landscape

Hunting Island is one of the few South Carolina barrier islands that still largely retains its natural semi-tropical environment. Although Europeans visited the Beaufort area as early as 1520, and the town of Beaufort was settled by 1712, Hunting Island remained unsettled until the late 1930s. Today, the island's landscape reflects centuries-old land use patterns where the focus was on maintaining the environment rather than subordinating it to agricultural use or development.

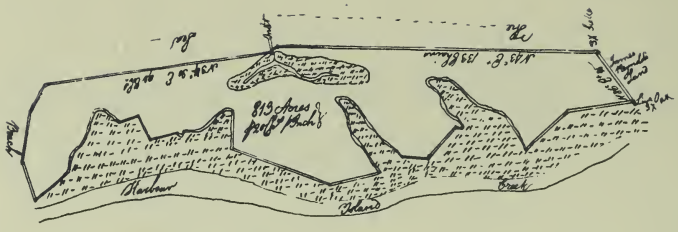
Perhaps the major reason for this lack of disturbance was the island's geography. The sandy coastline and interior dune ridges were uninviting to settlers looking for good crop land. Lack of easy access to the island further discouraged settlement. Until completion of the first bridge in the 1940s, Hunting Island could only be reached by boat. This isolation protected a distinctive beach, forest, and wildlife habitat that continue to be conserved today as a state park.

The "Hunting" Islands

The name "Hunting" stems from the island's historic use. From the early 1700s the island was a hunting haven for nearby planters. Large parties, equipped with horses, dogs, servants, tents and other necessary items, would boat over and spend a week or more hunting deer. Robert Mills noted in 1825 that "Hunting is the principal amusement of the [Beaufort County] planters, and its consequent associations at the club house."

A traveler in 1878 wrote that Hunting Island "which seems to have been reserved as a park for the sporting gentry, was the scene of many a glorious day's sport.... The mode of hunting was for drivers with the hounds to proceed in the hollow between two ridges and beat up the deer. The hunters kept pace on the outer side of the ridges, and as the deer mounted to the crest they blazed away." Deer hunting remained the major use of the island until it became a public park in the 1930s.

James Cook's 1773 map of South Carolina refers collectively to the barrier islands off St. Helena as "Hunting Islands." By the 1860s, however, the other islands in this chain had acquired individual names (Eddings, Chaplins, Prentis) and only the northernmost island retained the name "Hunting" (opposite page).

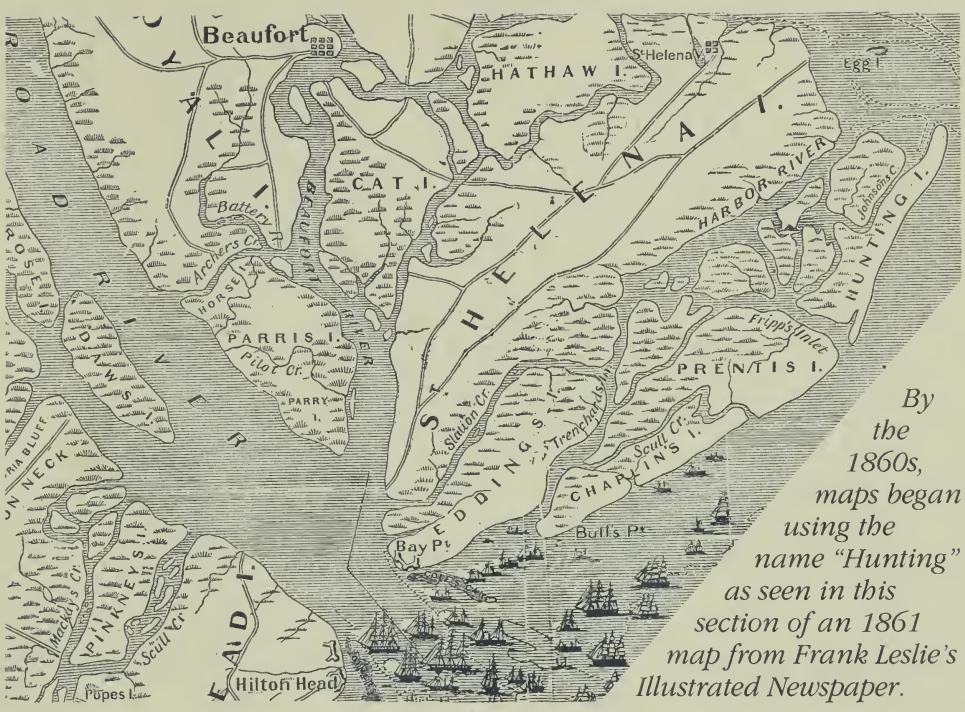


Hunting or Reynolds Island?

This adaptation of William Reynolds' 1761 plat of the island shows 813 acres "situate on an island called Reynold's Island."

One of the earliest recorded owners, Richard Reynolds, acquired land on Hunting Island in 1713. Members of the Reynolds family retained these landholdings throughout most of the 18th century. This lengthy ownership led to the island becoming known as "Reynolds Island."

The 1825 map of the Beaufort District by Robert Mills also names the island "Reynolds." Note that this map shows the Reynolds plantation on St. Helena Island.



By the 1860s, maps began using the name "Hunting" as seen in this section of an 1861 map from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper.

Hunting Island and the Civil War

In 1858, only a few years before the outbreak of the Civil War, a group of local men under the name of Captain John Fripp and Company bought 2,000 acres on the southern end of Hunting Island for a hunting preserve. In addition to John Fripp, the company included the following prominent Beaufort citizens; Edward M. Capers, John G. Barnwell, Clarence Fripp, Alviro Fripp, J. Edings Fripp, Dr. W. J. Jenkins, and W. G. Capers.

During the early days of the Civil War in November 1861, the Union fleet seized Port Royal Sound and the Beaufort area and held them throughout the war. In fear, local landowners left their coastal homes and plantations and fled inland. Later, these vacated properties were declared "abandoned lands" and were confiscated by Union forces.

Both the Fripp Company's southern portion and the northern section of Hunting Island were among the properties that were confiscated and later sold. In 1863 the northern section of the island was purchased by Henry McKee. The Fripp Company's portion was sold for $100 at public auction in Beaufort in 1876.

Expedition To Port Royal--Government Buildings Erected On Hilton Head, S.C. By The Federal Forces Under General Sherman 1861-2.

The Penn Center

It was on nearby St. Helena that the Penn School, the first school for freed slaves in America, was founded in early 1862. Edward Pierce was appointed to head up the project which became known as the Port Royal Experiment. A few months later the first teacher, Laura Towne, arrived in St. Helena.

Begun before freedom, the Penn School continued after emancipation to teach thousands of former slaves and to help them adjust to their newly acquired opportunities and rights. Through the years the center has remained a significant African-American cultural and educational institution. During the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Penn Center served as a retreat for bi-racial conferences and as a meeting place for movement leaders including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young, and John Lewis.

Today the entire 50-acre campus of the Penn Center, set among magnificent moss-laden oaks, is listed as a National Historic Landmark District.

Twentieth Century Owners Retain Hunting Tradition

By the 1920s Hunting Island was divided among three out-of-state owners: Dr. Arthur Wells Elting of Albany, New York; James M. Cameron of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and the United States Government. In 1859 the federal government had acquired a portion of the island and constructed the first Hunting Island Lighthouse.

Elting and Cameron, both investors with other landholdings in the Beaufort area, continued to maintain the island as a hunting preserve. Elting served for many years as chief surgeon of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad Corporation, taught at the Albany Medical College, and was president of the American Surgical Association.

The Cameron family had influenced economic and political affairs in Pennsylvania since the mid-1800s. Cameron's mother, Elizabeth Sherman Cameron, was a niece of General William T. Sherman. His father, J. Donald Cameron, was a United States Senator and had served as Secretary of War under President Ulysses S. Grant.

Hunting Island Becomes State Park

The first bridge connecting Beaufort and Ladies Island was completed in 1926. Plans to construct a bridge to Hunting Island were thwarted by the stock market crash of 1929. In 1935, however, the idea was reborn along with a vision of making Hunting Island a public park. Several Beaufort citizens visited the island's owners, Elting and Cameron, and convinced them to donate the land to Beaufort County for a public park and game sanctuary. The county acquired ownership of the entire island when the federal government granted the lighthouse property to them in 1936.

Beaufort County planned to use the labor and resources of the Civilian Conservation Corps to build recreation areas on the island for both Whites and African-Americans. By 1938, however, the county found the cost of the project beyond their means and deeded the island to the South Carolina Commission of Forestry. Ownership continued in the Forestry Commission's hands until 1967 when it was transferred to the newly-formed agency, the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism.

Civilian Conservation Corps Builds State Park

Hunting Island was one of sixteen state parks begun by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in South Carolina. The CCC, a work relief program for unemployed young men initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was established in 1933 to ease the ravages of the depression and conserve the nation's natural resources.

CCC work began at Hunting in April 1938 and continued until April 1942. The most important task completed by the young enrollees was the building of the Hunting Island causeway across approximately two miles of marshlands.

Other CCC construction at Hunting Island included the construction of the CCC camp, signs designating the park as a "Game Sanctuary," picnic shelters, fireplaces, oyster ovens, and drinking fountains.

The Hunting Island CCC Camp was closed and park construction halted in April 1942 because of the country's entry into World War II. Hurricanes, storms and the continuing erosion of the island's shoreline have destroyed all structures built by the CCC except the causeway and two buildings from the CCC Base Camp: the Bachelor Officer Quarters (now Cabin #12) and the Mess Hall (now the District Warehouse, located in the Park Service Area). These buildings are a structural reminder of the pioneering work done by the young men in the CCC.

Enrollees at the Hunting Island CCC Camp encountered a series of hardships. Among the more annoying and persistent hazards were the swarms of ever-biting mosquitoes on the island. Two major disasters also complicated their work: a devastating forest fire in 1938 and a violent hurricane that hit the island in August 1940. During the hurricane the young men took refuge in the lighthouse, the sturdiest structure on the island. The hurricane's 90 mph winds and 12-14 foot tides resulted in the death of one CCC enrollee, destroyed and damaged hundreds of trees, and wrecked much of the initial park construction.

The following quote about the massive fire in 1938 is taken from official CCC records: "On June 9, 1938, a fire broke out on the Island and even with the help of Marines and boys from an adjacent camp it was three days before it was controlled. Shortly thereafter the Light House Quarters in which the boys slept was destroyed by fire."

CCC workers on tram line which ran from dock on Johnson Creek to the lighthouse. All supplies for the island arrived by way of these small carts.

Later Developments on Hunting Island

During World War II, several branches of the military were stationed on Hunting Island. On April 15, 1942, the Army Air Corps began using the lighthouse as a radio station. That November the Coast Guard took over the island to protect the coastline. The park remained closed to the public until the end of the war.

Park construction resumed in the 1950s. During this decade, electricity was run to the island, bath houses were constructed on both sections of the park, and the first visitor cottages were constructed. In July 1966, all state parks, including Hunting Island, began operating on a completely desegregated basis.

The park's public buildings now include an interpretive center/office, nature and recreation center, 200-site camping area, trading post, concession, three picnic shelters, 15 visitor cabins, and the lighthouse complex.

Now used as a nature center, this building was the bath house for African-American visitors when park facilities were separate. Located on the northeast end of the island, the structure is threatened by continuing beach erosion.

Hunting Island Lighthouse

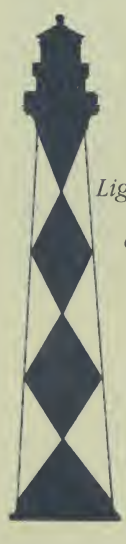
From the time of mariners' earliest ventures away from land, there was a need for signals to guide them safely home and to warn of hazards. (The need was particularly acute in darkness.) In ancient times, there were many references to signal fires being lighted on clifftops and hills. Later, towers were used to increase the visibility of the flames. The most spectacular ancient lighthouse was the Pharos at Alexandria Harbor, built around 300 BC.

Lighthouses continued to be important fixtures along some of the coastlines of the world for thousands of years. With the great increase in overseas trade following the age of discovery, merchants led the way in demanding increased protection for their commerce. Technical advances in lighthouses came rapidly, led by the seafaring nations of western Europe.

During the 18th century, advances in engineering allowed lighthouses to be built in remote and exposed locations, including submerged rocks far off shore. Flames were made brighter by advances in the use of liquid fuels, while sophisticated use of reflectors and lenses concentrated and focused the light into a single powerful beam that could be seen at great distances.

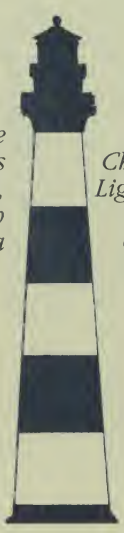
North American colonists benefitted from many of these advances. In 1716 the first lighthouse completed in North America, the Little Brewster light, marked the entrance to Boston harbor. Others quickly followed. After 1789, the newly independent United States entered into an ambitious program of lighting its shores. By 1820, 55 lighthouses warned of hazards, marked harbors and provided accurate positions to mariners along the Atlantic coast. By 1845 the Atlantic and Great Lakes shorelines were illuminated by 256 principal lighthouses, 30 lightships and 1000 buoys.

It was recognized that the establishment and construction of lighthouses, as well as the standardization and publication of lighthouse signals, should be a national responsibility. Each lighthouse was painted a unique pattern of color and design and assigned a sequence of flashing beacons which clearly identified it. These identifying signatures, their exact location, and other information on coastal signals were published on a regular basis as "Notice to Mariners."



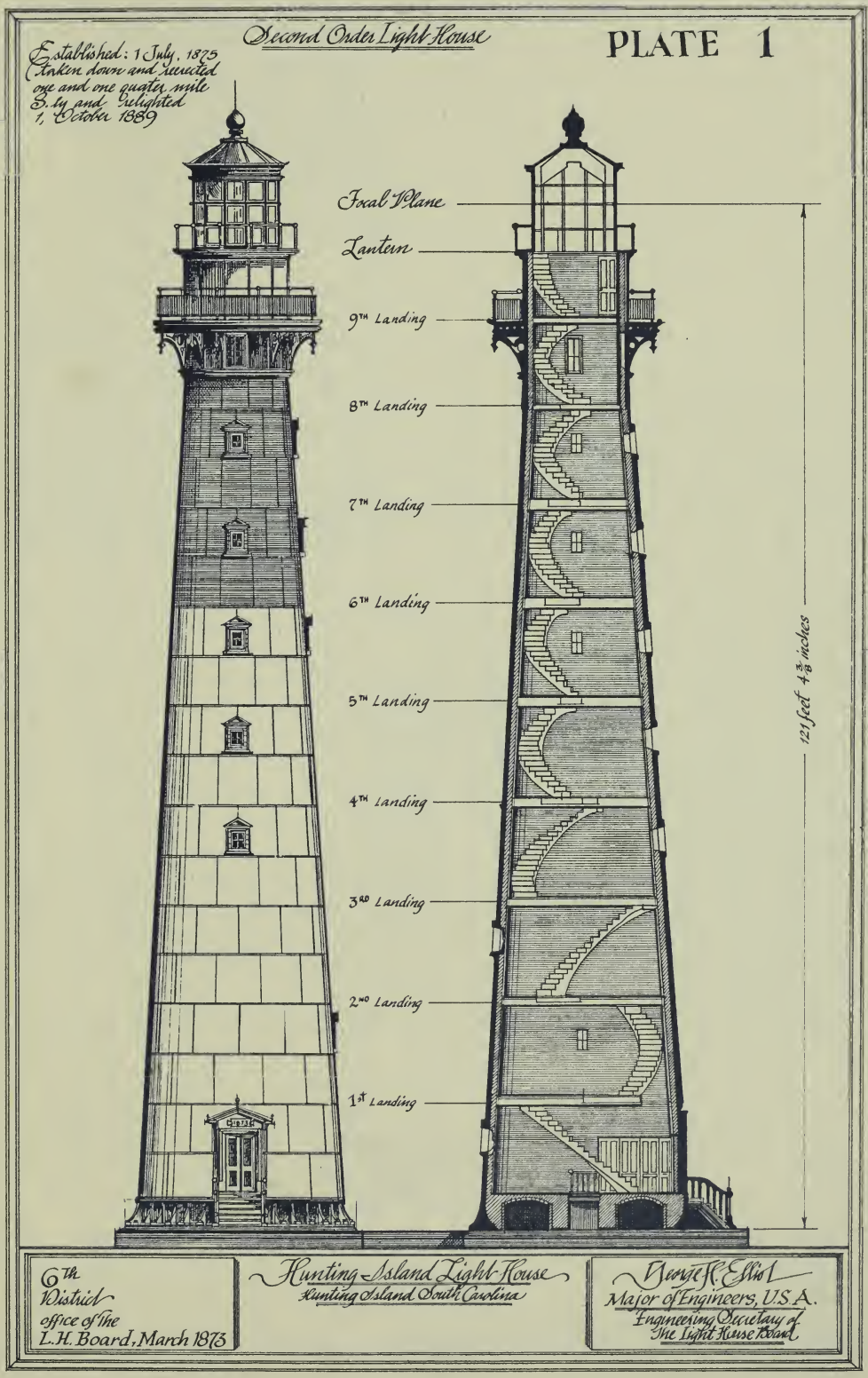
Cape Lookout Lighthouse, North Carolina

Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, North Carolina



Old Charleston Lighthouse, South Carolina

Hunting Island Lighthouse, South Carolina


Second Order Light House
PLATE 1
Established: 1 July, 1875
Taken down and erected
one and one quater mile
S. by and relighted
1, October 1889
Focal Plane
Lantern
9TH Landing
8TH Landing
7TH Landing
6TH Landing
5TH Landing
4TH Landing
3RD Landing
2ND Landing
1ST Landing
121 feet 4 3/8 inches
6th District
office of the
L.H. Board, March 1873
Hunting Island Light-House
Hunting Island South Carolina
George H. Elliot
Major of Engineers, U.S.A.
Engineering Secretary of
The Light House Board

The first lighthouse at Hunting Island was completed in 1859 to replace a lightship which had marked the shoals of St. Helena Sound. The structure was blown up by the Confederates during the Civil War.

Once again a lightship was posted off the northern tip of Hunting Island until a new lighthouse could be constructed. The new tower was begun in 1874, 1/4 mile from the ocean and there was some criticism that it was too far from the shore. Reports from the site, however, indicated that the ocean was rapidly eroding the beach. The site of the 1859 lighthouse had already been claimed by the ocean. Work proceeded only during the winter because of the fear of malaria. The beacon was lit in 1875.

Only 14 years after it was completed, the advancing ocean threatened the tower. In 1889, it was disassembled and moved from the rapidly-eroding northern point of Hunting Island. The possibility of relocation had been considered in the design of the lighthouse. The shell was composed of curved cast iron panels weighing roughly 1200 pounds each, designed to be completely interchangeable in any location on the tower. The interior of the lighthouse was lined with a solid wall of brick linked to iron flanges on the assembled shell. Cast iron stairs and decks completed the structure.

The tower displayed a light 133 feet above mean high tide. The light was second order, meaning that only one class of lighthouse had a more powerful beacon. The lighting mechanism boasted the best technical advances of the day which had become standard throughout the United States Lighthouse Service. The flame was provided by vaporizing oil inside a hollow wick or mantle, in much the same manner as a modern pressurized kerosene camping lantern. A parabolic metal reflector was turned at precise intervals by a large clock-type mechanism located in the base of the tower. A large shaft ran to the top. The light was further concentrated into a single beam aimed at the horizon by a Fresnel lens. These lenses consisted of a series of specially ground prisms arranged in a beehive shaped rack. Light from the reflector which revolved inside the lens was bent by each prism to align exactly along a horizontal plane. This ingenious mechanism took what was a relatively small flame and produced a single 100,000 candlepower beam which could be seen 18 miles at sea.

Although the lighting mechanism of the Hunting Island tower was removed when it was decommissioned in 1933, the remains of a similar Fresnel lens can be seen in the base of the tower.

The complex contained a keeper's house, a brick oil storage building, several frame storage buildings and two cisterns for storage of drinking water. A tram railroad was constructed to a wharf on Johnson Creek to expedite the transportation of oil for the light, construction material and supplies for the keeper.

Having learned the lesson of the ocean's extreme erosion at Hunting Island, the tower was relocated 1 1/4 mile from the shore. A century later, the ocean is again threatening and lies less that 400 feet from the tower, a testimony to the transient nature of barrier islands and the power of the sea.

The Fresnel lens was a significant advance in lighthouse technology. Individually ground prisms were precisely set in a frame so as to concentrate a small gas light into a single powerful beam. The Hunting Island Lighthouse had a second order lens.

Until the arrival of the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1938, the keepers of the Hunting Island Lighthouse were the only permanent inhabitants of the island. The keeper's house, shown here, was used to house members of the Civilian Conservation Corps while they developed the park. The structure burned in 1938.

The large shoals of St. Helena Sound greatly influence erosion on Hunting Island by trapping sand destined for its shores.

SOUTH CAROLINA'S DYNAMIC BARRIER ISLANDS

South Carolina's coast is protected over much of its length by barrier islands. These islands serve as the front line of defense, protecting the valuable salt marshes and mainland forests from wind, waves and destructive storms. As they confront these powerful forces, the islands are eroded, rebuilt and reshaped. It is this flexibility and dynamic nature which enables them to survive.

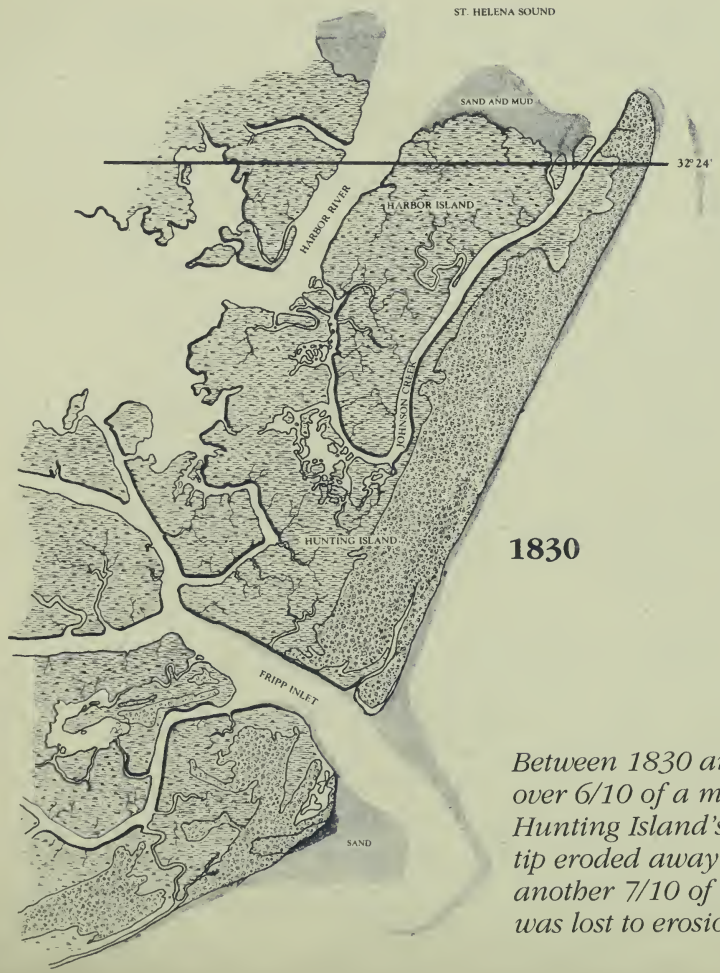
South Carolina's barrier islands began forming about 4000 years ago. They consist of loose, sandy sediments from the Appalachian Mountains carried to the sea by rivers. As more sediments were deposited, the islands built seaward. As they grew, new dunes were built and the older dune ridges were left in the interior of these islands. These older ridges show the shape and position of earlier shorelines and can be observed throughout the forest at Hunting Island.

Historically, Hunting Island has been one of the most erosional of South Carolina's barrier islands. Average annual erosion along the shore is about 10 feet a year. Erosion is greater at the center of the island, while the extreme northern and southern ends are relatively stable. Historically, the greatest erosion has occurred at the northern tip of the island, which has lost almost two miles of land over the past two centuries. Severe winter "northeasters" and hurricanes have caused extreme erosion periodically. The keepers of the Hunting Island Lighthouse reported 400 feet of erosion during a single season shortly before the tower was moved. The beach receded as much as 100 feet during winter storms of 1962.

Many other islands along the South Carolina coast have far less erosion and some are building seaward. All barrier islands in the state are subject to the movement of sand caused by wind-driven waves and currents. Anyone who has played in the surf on a windy day has felt the powerful pull of the water along the shore. Water has the ability to suspend and carry tons of sand along the beach. This sand movement is known as longshore transport.

The movement of sand along the east coast is generally from north to south and is most affected by winter and spring storms which blow from the northeast. The lighter prevailing southwesterly winds of summer often move sand northward, but they cannot counter the cumulative opposite effect of the more powerful northeasters.

Hunting Island, like most of the state's sea islands, is stout. Backed by mature salt marsh, South Carolina barrier islands differ from the long, thin barriers of North Carolina's Outer Banks, which are backed by vast open lagoons. The continental shelf is wide and shallow off South Carolina because South Carolina's coast is located within the Georgia Embayment, an indentation of the coastline extending from Cape Lookout, North Carolina into Florida. The shallow continental shelf and the concave shape of the embayment provide additional distance over shallow water to concentrate the tidal flow. Therefore, the 7-foot tides at Hunting Island are twice as great as the 3-foot tides at Cape Hatteras. Because of these higher tides, a large number of inlets have developed to effectively channel water



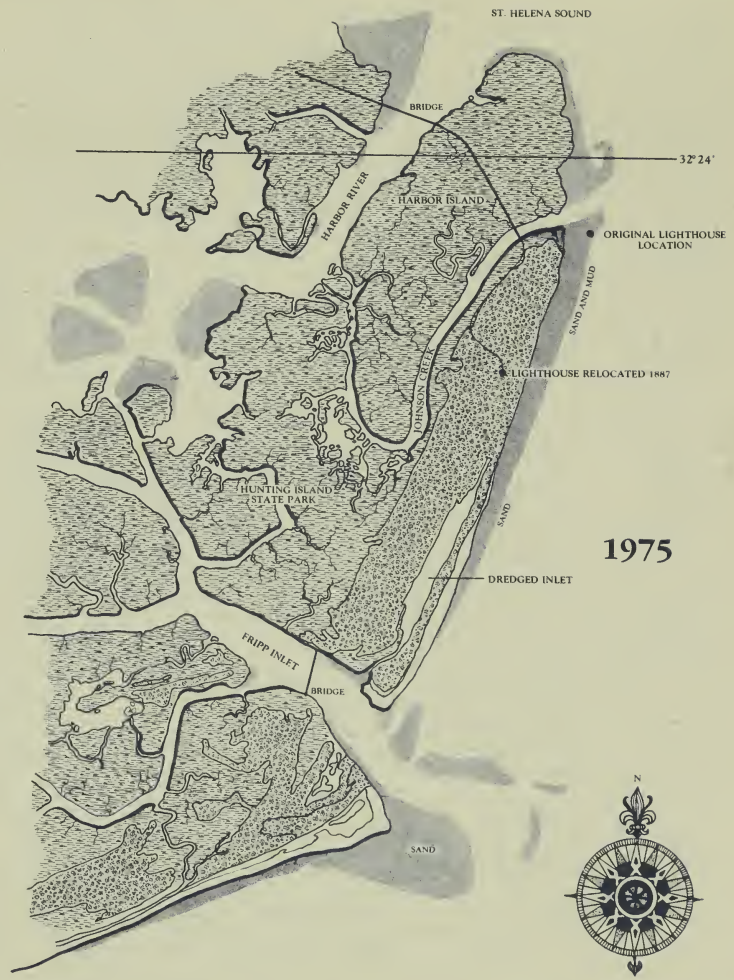
1830

1875

Between 1830 and 1875, over 6/10 of a mile of Hunting Island's northern tip eroded away. By 1930, another 7/10 of a mile was lost to erosion.

1930

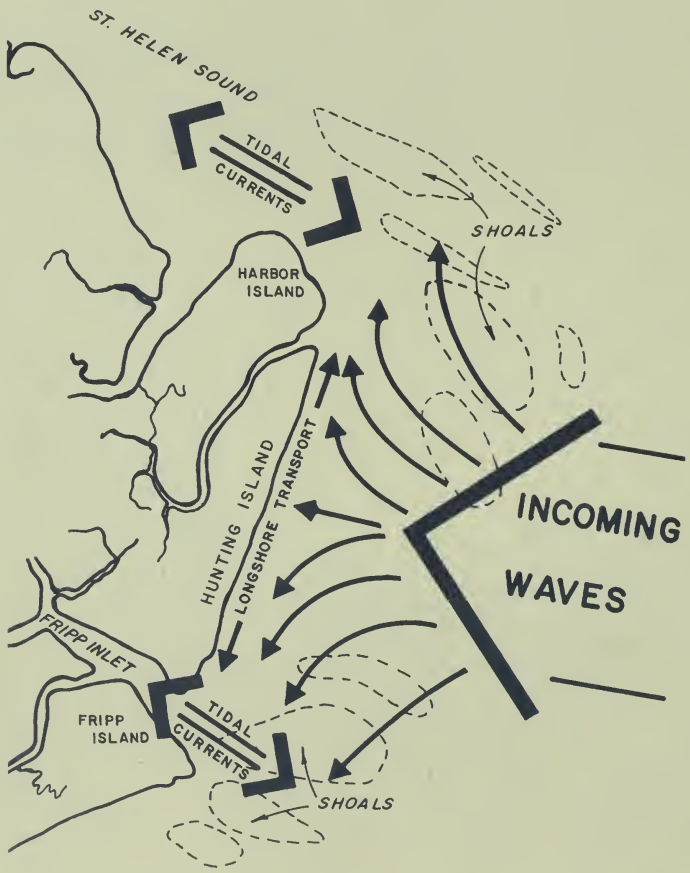
During the twentieth century, erosion on Hunting Island has averaged 25 feet annually on the northern tip and ten feet annually on the central beach. Recently, the island's northern tip has begun to stabilize, but erosion continues through the island's center.



1975

in and out of the salt marshes. As a result, South Carolina's southern coast is broken up by many stable inlets located 5 to 10 miles apart. The inlets and their associated tidal deltas play a major role in the dynamics of South Carolina's beaches and dunes.

Tidal deltas are simply deposits of sand and mud that have been washed into or out of an inlet. Along the South Carolina coast, the seaward or ebb-tidal deltas are the largest and most important tidal deltas. Larger inlets have larger deltas. A delta's size is determined by the tidal currents flowing through the inlet and the energy of the waves which strike them. This balance determines the amount of sand in the delta and affects the adjacent shorelines. These deltas, often referred to as "sand bars" or "shoals," are conspicuous at either end of Hunting Island. While rarely exposed above water, they can be identified by the waves which break over their shallow waters far offshore.



Waves approaching Hunting Island form a broad arc as they pass over the shoals of St. Helena Sound and Fripp Inlet. Waves passing over the shoals of St. Helena Sound are bent toward the west. By the time these waves reach the shore they often break to the north. Likewise, waves passing over the shoals of Fripp Inlet transport sand to the south. This bending of waves allows sand to shift to the north.

Inlets affect beach erosion in several ways. Sandbars or shoals in the ebb-tidal deltas are natural breakwaters, sheltering adjacent beaches from erosional forces. However, irregularities in the shoals can change the direction of incoming waves and produce rapid erosion in certain areas.

St. Helena Sound to the north and Fripp Inlet to the south greatly affect erosion on Hunting Island. Waves approaching Hunting Island form a broad arc as they pass over the shoals of St. Helena Sound and Fripp Inlet. Hunting Island's shoreline is out of alignment with the incoming waves. As the waves reach the shore they erode the island's center to align the beach with the incoming waves, although other forces are occurring which prevent the alignment.

As waves approach the island from the northeast, they pass over the large shoals of St. Helena Sound and are bent toward the west. By the time these waves reach the shore they often break to the north. This bending of waves around the shoals allows sand to shift to the north. In certain situations this sand could accumulate or accrete at the north end of the island, allowing the shoreline to align with the waves. However, large inlets can alter this process and produce severe local erosion. Such is the case at Hunting Island. St. Helena Sound is one of the largest inlets on the southeastern coast. Its currents are very powerful and sweep the sand away from the northern shore before it can settle to stabilize the island. The result is some of the most extensive shoals along the South Carolina coast.

Beach erosion can also be caused by man-made structures like jetties as well as natural barriers such as shoals. Jetties are inlet-stabilizing structures that extend into the sea. Because they are perpendicular to the shore, they trap sand moving southward. This allows land north of the jetty to accrete, while lands to the south are deprived of the natural sand supply. An example of erosion caused by jetties can be seen at Morris Island. The remains of the original Morris Island lighthouse, just south of the Charleston Harbor jetties, once stood firmly on the island. Now after over a century of sand deprivation it lies almost two miles offshore. Other man-made structures that contribute to beach erosion include seawalls and groins.

When an island continues to erode, there are few options available to retard the process. Seawalls and groins can be built at an enormous cost, but these features affect erosion farther down the coast. Another option is renourishment, the addition of sand to a beach to replace sand lost to erosion. It is, however, only a temporary solution to beach erosion as it cannot correct the forces that caused the erosion. Sand used to renourish a beach needs to have a similar grain size as the sand already on the beach. Sand of the wrong grain size erodes quicker and can pack too tightly, affecting animals such as sea turtles, which nest on the beaches where they were born.

Since 1968, five renourishment projects have been performed on Hunting Island to slow erosion. These projects have added over four million cubic feet of sand to the shoreline, yet most of the sand has been removed by the natural forces which have affected the island for thousands of years.

Renourishment of Hunting Island's beach began on February 8, 1991, as sand was pumped from over two miles offshore.

On March 23, After six weeks of continuous pumping of sand, renourishment of the beach was completed.

COASTAL HABITATS

Hunting Island is made up of many distinct habitats, all of which are influenced by salt concentration, wind and salt spray. These habitats often occur adjacent to each other. Other factors including variations in water level, temperature, salinity and soil type determine the plants and animals which live and grow in these communities.

Beach

Hunting Island has over four miles of beach. This is a harsh and changing place where unstable sands are constantly pounded and shifted by the sea. For this reason no plants grow here, but many animals including crustaceans and mollusks abound in the surf.

Most of Hunting Island is affected by erosion. Portions of the shore contain skeletons of trees standing in the surf. These skeletons belonged to trees which once grew in the protection of the maritime forest. They now stand as reminders that the sea has and continues to encroach on the island. Many visitors find the presence of the mature forest at the edge of the beach to be an interesting and unusual feature at Hunting Island, a sign of an island that is being rapidly reclaimed by the sea.

As the sea encroaches on the island's forests, tree skeletons often remain standing in the surf.

One may find shells and other interesting objects while walking along the wet sands of the beach. Sea shells are the "skeletal" remains of invertebrate marine animals. These soft bodied creatures lack internal skeletons. Instead, their support comes from an external shell that grows as they grow. Some of these animals live many miles offshore, but others live right in the surf, in the mud of creeks and inlets as well as in the salt marsh. When these animals die, the ocean's currents often wash their shells ashore.

In addition to shells, the beach also teems with birdlife. The shore is an excellent place to observe the brown pelican. Easily recognized by its pouched beak, this large gray-brown bird has a white head and dark brown feathers down the back of its neck. It frequents any saltwater area where its favorite foods, mullet and menhaden, are found. This familiar

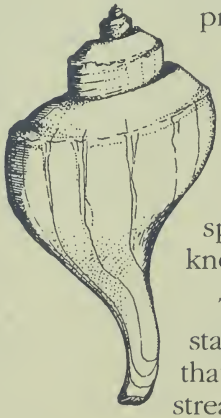
and beloved bird nearly became extinct due to the use of pesticides like Endrine and DDT. As these chemicals entered the food chain, they were concentrated in predator species. They caused birds to lay thin shelled eggs. Because pelicans are large, the eggs broke under the weight of the parents. With federal protection and the ban of such chemicals as DDT, pelicans are once again common along the coast.

Frequently seen hovering above the surf, the least tern is the smallest of South Carolina's terns. Between 8-10 inches in length, these birds nest in colonies on sandy dunes with a fair amount of shell fragments and little or no plant cover. Nests are rarely more than a scrape in the sand, into which the female lays two or three camouflaged eggs. Although still fairly common, its populations have declined in recent years due to the loss of nesting habitat associated with beach front development. If you happen to wander into an area where terns or other birds appear disturbed, please carefully leave the area as you are probably in a nesting colony.

Common Shells at Hunting Island

Shell collecting is a favorite activity for many people who walk the beach. No matter how often you visit the shore, you are likely to discover something new and wonderful. If you like to collect shells, take only empty ones. Please leave live animals at the shore for others to enjoy observing.

The Knobbed Whelk is a prized find while walking along Hunting Island's shore. Growing to a length of ten inches, this large marine snail lives in shallow coastal waters of the surf and tidal creeks. Its favorite foods include clams. For protection, the clam will close its shells tightly, but the whelk is strong. By gripping the clam with its large muscular foot, it wedges the edge of its shell between the two halves of the clam's shell and pries the clam open to get its meal.



Similar to the knobbed whelk is the channeled whelk. Channeled whelks, which grow to eight inches, lack the knobs on the shell that knobbed whelks possess. Instead they have a deep, U-shaped groove which spirals around the top of the shell. Like the knobbed whelk, it eats clams.

The lettered olive, South Carolina's state shell, is another marine snail that prefers shallow water. This streamlined snail is adapted for speeding through the sand. It relies on its speed to capture coquina clams and mole crabs found burrowed in the sand of the surf. This olive's long, thin shell is adorned with dark script-like markings from which it gets its name.

In addition to snails, shells of other mollusks known as bivalves are found on the beach. Bivalves possess two shell halves instead of one shell as in the snails. Most shells found on Hunting Island's beaches belonged to

bivalves. Many different kinds of shells may be found, but some of the most common are the giant atlantic cockle, the angelwing, pen clams and the quahog clam (pronounced Co-hog.)

The giant atlantic cockle is the most common cockle found at Hunting Island. This heart-shaped shell which often grows to four-inches, lives in the clean unstable sands of the shallow water just offshore. Like all bivalves, it filters its food from the sea water.

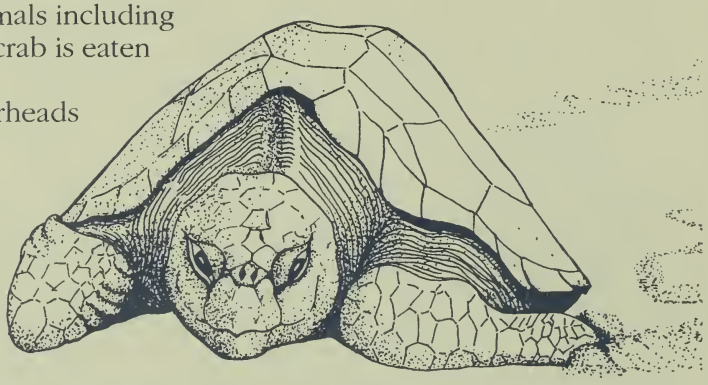
Three different angelwings live around Hunting Island. They are the common angelwing, the fallen angelwing and the Campeche angelwing. These animals have long, white, highly-sculptured shells which resemble wings. They use the fine teeth on the front of their shells to burrow into the clay and mud of tidal flats where they live.

Pen clams are large bivalves that have distinctive wedge-shaped shells. The brown, translucent shells are thin, flexible and fragile. They live partially buried in the mud of the salt marsh. Three pen clams are found in these waters, the sawtooth pen, the stiff pen and the spiny pen.

Quahogs are thick, hard-shelled clams which grow to six inches. These are the commercial clams of the East and are known by various names in the seafood industry, depending upon their size. The tender young little necks are often eaten raw. Half-grown quahogs (cherrystones) are by far the most popular for eating. Large quahogs are known as chowder clams, which indicates their usage.

Quahog was a favorite food of the coastal Indians, as demonstrated by the large number of these shells found in shell mounds. Indians made prized purple "wampum" from the shell's purple edges.

During the summer months, the beaches of Hunting Island provide nesting habitat for the loggerhead sea turtle. The word loggerhead means "large head." This turtle is one of five species of sea turtles that visit the coastal waters of South Carolina, and the only one that commonly nests here. It spends much of its life in the shallow offshore waters, migrating along the coast in search of food. A variety of marine animals including jellyfish, shrimp and crab is eaten by this turtle.



Each spring, loggerheads enter the waters just offshore to breed. Nesting occurs at night. The female digs a nest with her hind flippers and deposits an average of 125 eggs near the sand dunes, usually above the high-water mark. After 60 days, the hatchlings emerge and quickly head for the sea. It is believed that the hatchlings direct themselves toward the clear horizon and light reflecting off the ocean's surface to find their way.

Egg mortality is attributed to salt water intrusion, heavy beach traffic and predators such as raccoons and ghost crabs. Hatchlings are sometimes disoriented by artificial lighting along our increasingly developed shore and die of exposure before reaching the sea.

Numerous predators await them in the ocean as well as on the beach. Accidental deaths caused by trawler nets and the ingestion of plastic bags and balloons, which resemble jellyfish, their favorite food, also contribute to the loggerheads' demise. It is estimated that only three to four hatchlings per thousand survive to adulthood.

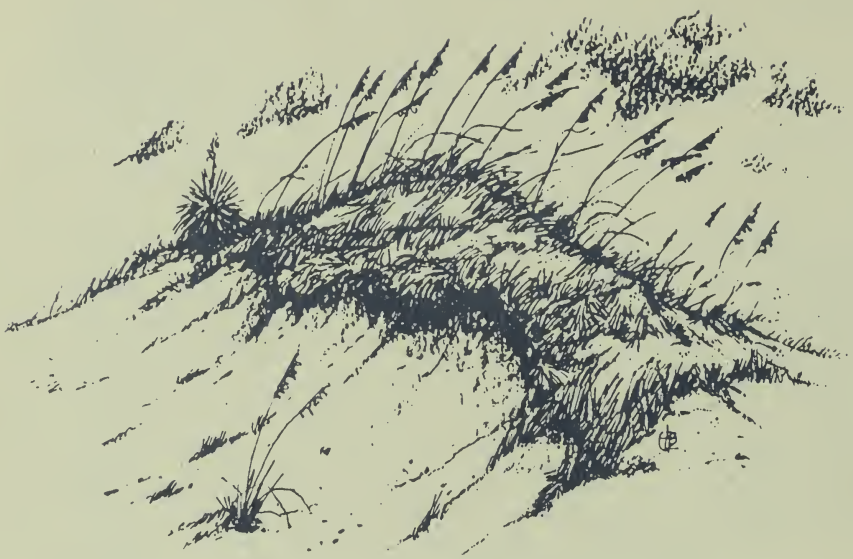
Hunting Island State Park actively monitors sea turtle nesting activity on the island. Each year between 50 to 100 female sea turtles nest on this beach. Due to the island's high rate of erosion, many turtle nests are relocated to more stable portions of the beach by experienced personnel. To insure survival, relocated nests are moved within six hours of laying. Therefore, all four miles of beach are patrolled every day during the nesting season to locate any nesting activity. The park has adopted a "lights out"

Sometimes beach erosion makes the relocation of sea turtle nests necessary. This self-releasing hatchery at Hunting Island is used for predator protection when nests require relocating by qualified personnel.

campaign during the nesting and hatching periods. This helps eliminate problems associated with turtle disorientation due to artificial lighting.

Programs on the loggerhead sea turtle are offered throughout the summer for park visitors. More information can be obtained on these programs by contacting the park office. Please remember that it is illegal to disturb nesting turtles and their nests. Please do not transport hatchling turtles to the water. It is important that they make this difficult journey themselves so they can imprint on this beach and return to this island to nest in the future.

Dunes



Since Hunting Island is highly erosional, few sand dunes are found along its length. Stable areas with dunes can only be found near both ends of the island. These dunes are built up throughout the year, but especially during the summer months when the wind and seas are calmer and push sand up onto the beach. Winds then distribute the dry sand by moving it along the shore. Obstructions like grasses, sticks and driftwood block the wind, forcing it to drop its load of sand. In this manner old dunes are rebuilt and new ones are formed. Seeds are also carried by the wind and caught by the same obstructions that catch the sand. Sea oats and cordgrass are two common colonizers of the dunes. Their roots penetrate deep into the sand to help stabilize the dune, while the exposed portions of the plants trap sand and continue to build the dunes.

The primary dunes, those closest to the ocean, absorb much of the ocean's fury. As a result, primary dunes usually possess little or no vegetation on their seaward side. When present, secondary dunes are located behind the primary dunes. They are frequently vegetated with a thick, dwarfed growth of shrubs including southern red cedar, wax myrtle, marsh elder, toothache tree and live oak. Because the primary dunes block much of the damaging salt spray, these less tolerant plants are able to grow here.

New dunes are built as beach debris blocks the wind and allows sand to build up.

As you pass over the dunes, you may notice small holes in the sand on or near the dunes. These holes are entrances to ghost crab burrows. This terrestrial crab often digs a burrow that is two to four feet deep. It is normally active at night but is often seen at or near the burrow entrance during the day. Its thick square body is sand colored, which camouflages the crab from predators such as seagulls.

Also typical of South Carolina beaches are maritime grasslands, which are located at the extreme ends of Hunting Island well above the monthly high tides. These gently rolling grasslands are harsh areas of low, shifting dunes. The plants and animals that live here are exposed to full sun, salt spray, high winds and constantly shifting sands. Salt-tolerant beach grasses including sea oats, dune panic grass, salt marsh hay and dune sandspur dominate the landscape, but sea lavender and a few other salt- and drought-tolerant herbs can also be found.

Just off the beach between the lighthouse and campground on the north end of the island are two interdune ponds, an aquatic habitat associated with sand dunes. They are permanent or temporary water bodies located in the swales between the dunes. The vegetation varies from one area to the next because of salinity, seasonal flooding, tides and depth. The ponds at Hunting Island contain large amounts of vegetation and resemble marshes rather than ponds. Portions of both ponds have eroded in the recent past. During severe storms, high tides frequently inundate these areas with salt water. Originally freshwater wetlands, they now contain brackish water. The largest area remains flooded throughout the year, while the smaller pond dries out during mid-summer. Plants and animals in this area include dune pennywort, common cattail, saw grass, seashore mallow and the American alligator.

Maritime Forest

Behind the dunes at the north and south ends of the island, salt-pruned shrubs grade into highly sculptured trees. This is the seaward edge of the maritime forest. It is dominated by slow-growing, salt-tolerant, evergreen trees and shrubs such as live oaks, yaupon hollies and southern red cedars. Wind-driven salt spray along the immediate coast produces a shearing effect on plants growing at the seaward edge. The force of the salt spray, coupled with wind-blown sand, naturally prunes the tender, young shoots of exposed plants. Moving inland, trees and shrubs grow taller and thicker, shielding the trees farther inland from the damaging salt spray and allowing less salt-resistant trees like slash pines and southern magnolias to grow. Because of Hunting Island's erosional nature, little salt pruning is evident on the island. Instead, the beachfront forest that is seen today actually developed in the protection of the island's interior. As the shoreline eroded, it encroached on the maritime forest until it reached its present location. A mature maritime forest at the sea's edge is a sign of a rapidly eroding shoreline. Salt-pruned vegetation can still be seen at both ends of the island as well as near the large interdune pond near the campground.

Wind-driven salt spray along the immediate coast produces a shearing effect on plants growing at the seaward edge of the forest.

In addition to beach processes and salt pruning, Hunting Island's forests are also shaped by hurricanes and fire. Numerous hurricanes and severe storms have pounded Hunting Island over the centuries. Since 1893, five hurricanes have severely impacted the landscape by uprooting and breaking off trees as well as killing many more plants by exposing their roots to high concentrations of salt from the storm surge. In fact, it was reported that the hurricane of 1940 eliminated all trees, except cabbage palmettos, for nearly 100 feet from the shore. Today, few large trees grow on the island. Those that do are usually located deep in the island's interior, protected by the smaller surrounding trees and old dune ridges.

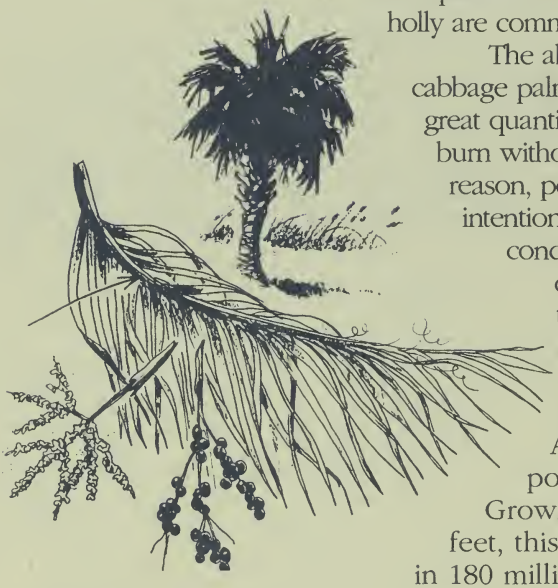
Over the years, forest fires have swept across the island, serving as a major factor in the shaping of Hunting Island's forest. Abundant slash pines and cabbage palmettos on the island produce great quantities of forest fuels that serve as tinder for fires normally caused by early summer thunderstorms. These recurring fires encourage the growth of fire-tolerant species, like slash pine and cabbage palmetto, and eliminate species which are less resistent. A devastating wildfire in 1938 burned approximately two-thirds of the island over a three-day period. Reports state that the fire swept through the canopy, killing over ten percent of the trees. Also, the entire understory of shrubs, seedlings and herbs was burned clear. Most animals on the park escaped the fire by moving to the island's north end, which did not burn, or to neighboring Fripp Island. Some of the largest trees on the island that have survived fires and hurricanes can be found along old dune ridges in the forest at the island's north end.

Visitors notice the cabbage palmetto more than any other tree on the island. This palm, South Carolina's official state tree, gives the island a distinctly tropical appearance. Unlike most trees, it does not increase in girth as it grows taller and has no annual growth rings. Years of stress or drought to individual trees are sometimes evident as constricted necks or collars on the trunk. The importance of this tree in South Carolina's history is demonstrated by its prominence on the state flag and seal commemorating the Colonial victory on June 28, 1776 over the British fleet on Sullivans Island near Charleston. Colonial troops cut the palmettos and used the logs for fortification. The tree's soft, spongy wood easily absorbed the shelling from the British fleet.

The cabbage palmetto is found throughout the park, but is most commonly seen in the maritime forest. Other trees in Hunting Island's forest include live oaks and slash pines. Saw palmetto, wax myrtle and yaupon holly are common shrubs found in the forest.

The abundance of slash pine and cabbage palmetto on Hunting Island produces great quantities of forest fuel that periodically burn without man's intervention. For this reason, portions of the island's forest are intentionally burned under controlled conditions to maintain the natural character of the island, upon which the native plants and animals depend for survival.

Of the various reptiles that inhabit Hunting Island, the American alligator is very popular among park visitors. Growing to a length of almost 20 feet, this large reptile has changed little in 180 million years. The alligator is an



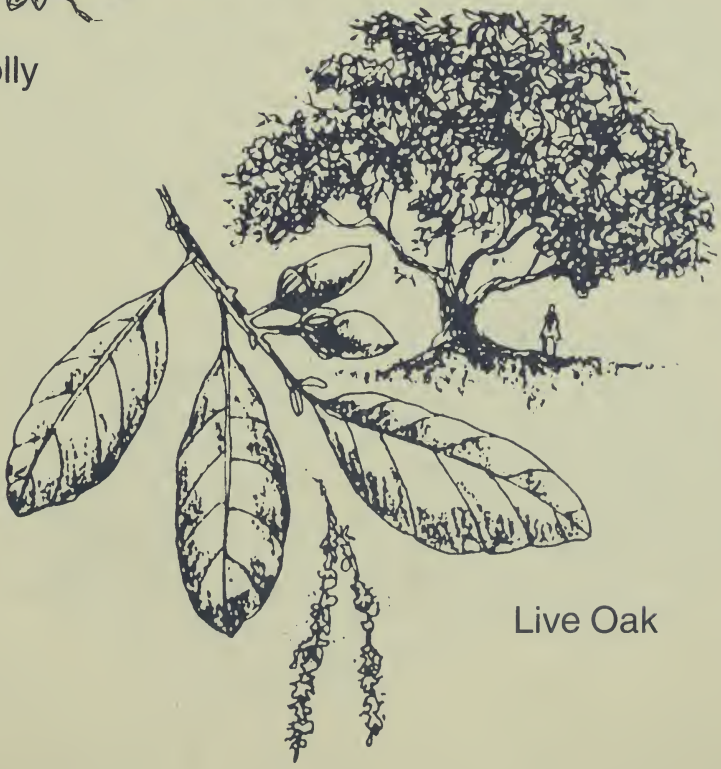
Cabbage Palmetto

Dwarf Palmetto

Saw Palmetto

Wax Myrtle

Yaupon Holly



Live Oak

efficient predator that sits atop the Hunting Island food chain. Taking a variety of foods, the mainstays are fish, turtles and snakes, but wading birds such as herons and egrets and deer sometimes fall victim.

From late April to early May, female alligators begin piling up mounds of mud and vegetation. The piles will eventually measure six to eight feet across and three to four feet high. These piles are actually alligator nests. When the nest is completed, the mother "gator" digs a hole in the center of the top of the mound and lays about 30 eggs. After laying the eggs,

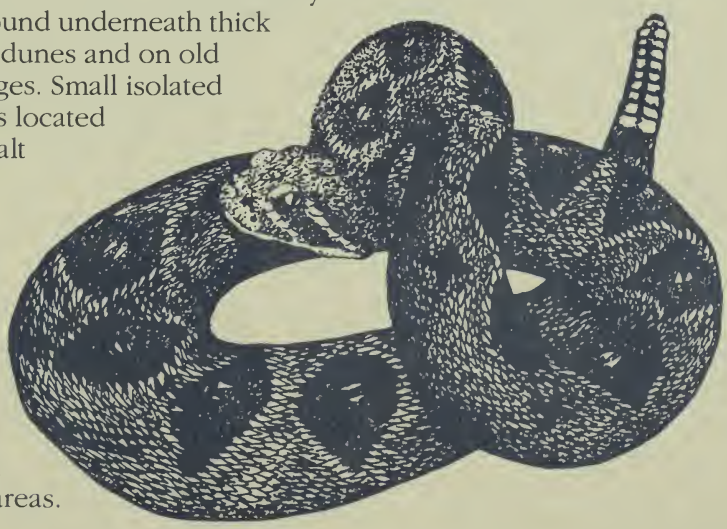
she covers them with additional mud and plant matter. The heat produced by the decomposition of this plant matter incubates the eggs.

During the next nine weeks, the mother remains around the nest to protect her eggs from predators like the raccoon, that considers alligator eggs a delicacy. When the eggs hatch, the female is drawn to the nest by the chirping of the newly-hatched young. She then begins digging in the mound to free her offspring and carry them to safety.

The best place for visitors to observe alligators is at the freshwater pond by the interpretive center. Here gators can be viewed from the safety of the boardwalk which leads to the park headquarters. It is not uncommon for alligators to nest near this pond. Alligators also stay in the interdune ponds between the lighthouse and campground, and occasionally are seen in the salt waters of the marsh, lagoon and surf. Alligators are large, powerful, unpredictable animals that can move faster than humans over short distances. Therefore, it is a good idea to give them a wide berth when you encounter them. Remember that it is illegal to feed alligators. Feeding these animals causes them to lose their natural fear of man and can create dangerous situations. Respect them as you should any other wild creature.

Of all the snakes that live on Hunting Island, the most interesting and dangerous is the eastern diamondback rattlesnake. Growing to a length of over six feet, the eastern diamondback is the largest poisonous snake in Eastern North America. Active during the early morning and late afternoon, this snake is rarely encountered by visitors. It has dark diamond-shaped markings with yellow margins along its back. On its head is a dark brown or black bar bordered by two yellow stripes extending from the eye to the mouth.

In South Carolina, the eastern diamondback is restricted to within 50 miles of the coast. It lives in two types of habitats of the state: pine flatwoods and coastal islands. On barrier islands they are most often found underneath thick tangles between dunes and on old interior dune ridges. Small isolated hammock islands located throughout the salt marsh are also favorite haunts for these snakes. Saltwater seems not to bother them as they readily swim across tidal creeks and salt marshes to reach these protected areas.



There is concern about the future of this animal in the state because of habitat loss, the commercial value of its venom for laboratories, and the indiscriminate killing by man. Little is known about the state's population of eastern diamondbacks. Unlike other rattlesnakes, the eastern diamondback has a low reproductive rate, producing only one clutch of about six young each year.

Areas for the greatest chance of encountering an eastern diamondback rattlesnake are in saw palmetto thickets along old dune ridges in the undeveloped southwestern end of the island.

While walking along trails and roadsides throughout the forest, other animals including birds and deer may be encountered. Painted buntings are common on Hunting Island during the summer. They can be found singing near dense shrub thickets at the edge of openings in the maritime forest. At first glance, they may be confused with other small red-colored birds. However, its purple head, green back and red rump and underparts clearly distinguish it from all other birds. The males are some of the fiercest of any birds, often battling to the death for a mate. They are often so preoccupied in battle that they can be approached close enough to be touched.

The Hunting Island white-tailed deer is commonly seen near the campground and along roadsides throughout the park. It is a subspecies of white-tailed deer that occurs only on Hunting, Fripp and Pritchards islands. Hunting Island deer are smaller and paler than the mainland deer.

Deer spend more time feeding than in any other activity. When travelling to feeding areas, they usually walk single file along well-established trails and disperse at the feeding site.

In most areas, deer live in small social groups, of which there are two; doe and buck. Doe or family groups consist of a single doe and her fawns. Buck groups have adult bucks and sometimes yearlings. Normally there is little contact between the two groups except during the breeding season.

Located within the maritime forest are areas of fresh and salt water. Several small freshwater areas, both natural and man-made, are located throughout the park. These serve a valuable function as rookery sites for the many herons and egrets found on the park.

The lagoon, located on the south end of the island, was once a freshwater marsh. A channel now connects it with the saltwater of Fripp Inlet, allowing it to ebb and flow with the tide. The sheltered waters offer fishermen the opportunity to fish for whiting, spot, sea trout, sea bass, drum and other saltwater fish.

Once a freshwater marsh, the lagoon now ebbs and flows with the tides.

The graceful great egret stands motionless while searching for food.

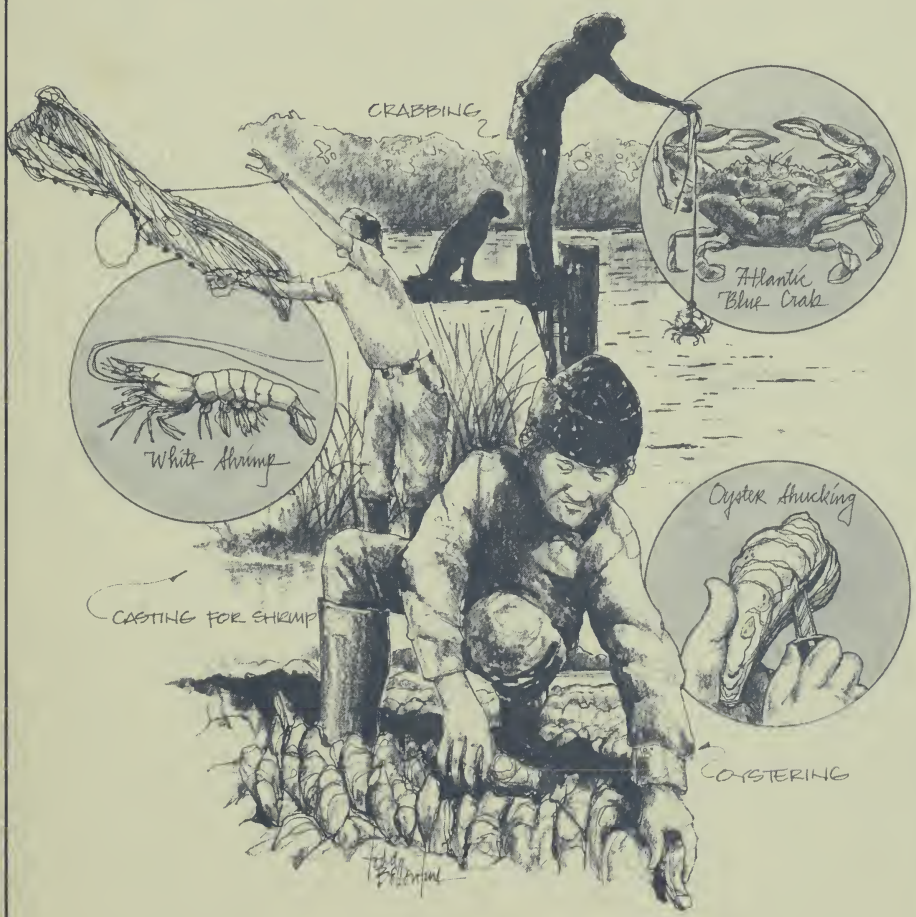
The great egret is often seen feeding in the lagoon with brown pelicans and various seagulls. This tall three- to four-foot white bird is easily identified by its yellow bill and long, black legs. Standing motionless in shallow water while hunting, it quickly catches its prey by thrusting its bill into the water. Great egrets feed mainly on small fish, but frogs, lizards, snakes, crabs and snails are also eaten. It nearly became extinct around the turn of the century because of the value of its plumes. With legal protection and a change in fashion, the great egret has made a remarkable recovery throughout its range.

Middens

Scattered in the maritime forest of Hunting Island are piles of shells. These are known as shell middens. Created over many years by coastal Indians, they are believed to be 1500-2500 years old. Comprised mainly of oyster shells, the middens also contain clam, periwinkle and whelk shells along with bone fragments and a small amount of pottery fragments. The high ratio of shells to artifacts suggests that Hunting Island middens sites were primarily temporary food collecting stations used year after year, It is likely that temporary camp sites were also present on the island. Future archaeological investigation may provide information on how Native Americans used barrier islands.

Over the years the middens are weathered by the elements, causing calcium from the shells to enter the ground and raise the calcium concentration of adjacent soils. Many middens contain shrubs and herbs, like shellmound bush and tough bumelia, which are dependent on the middens and these calcium-rich soils for their survival. If you happen to locate a midden, please do not take shells or disturb the site.

Man's Use of the Salt Marsh



The vast resources of South Carolina's salt marsh and coastline offer excellent opportunities for fishing, shrimping, crabbing and shellfish gathering.

Salt Marsh

Located between the island and the mainland is the salt marsh, a wide expanse of regularly flooded, tidally influenced land. The best place to explore the salt marsh is along the Garden Hammock trail. This 0.3 mile boardwalk spans a portion of the Hunting Island salt marsh leading to Garden Hammock. From here a series of trails and boardwalks lead to a crabbing dock beside a tidal creek. Many fascinating plants and animals can be observed all along the trail. Hunting Island State Park includes 3000 acres of salt marsh. Salt-tolerant grasses including smooth cordgrass, salt marsh hay and spike grass are the most numerous plants in the marsh.

Salt marshes are among the most productive habitats on earth. With an abundant supply of nutrients, they produce vast quantities of organic material from marsh grass, algae and bacteria. Tides frequently deposit debris including seaweeds and marsh grasses into the salt marsh. In warm weather, bacteria in the marsh quickly break down this debris. The by-product of this process is called "detritus". Many animals including fiddler crabs and marsh crabs eat detritus and excrete nitrate, phosphate and sulfate back into the salt marsh system.

Many organisms that live in the salt marsh are adapted to survive in certain areas of the marsh. Zones in the salt marsh include the high and low marsh. The ebb and flow of the tides, elevation, salinity, rainfall and a variety of other factors influence these areas.

The high salt marsh is the area of the marsh which is flooded from one to three hours each day. The most common plant found in this area is salt marsh hay, but other salt-tolerant plants such as glasswort, sea ox-eye and sea lavender also grow here. These plants help form a dense covering on the floor of the high marsh, trapping detritus, upon which the animals that live here depend.

The high salt marsh also contains low areas which trap and hold tidal waters. These brackish ponds are breeding grounds for salt marsh insects and the nurseries for many marine organisms.

Because of its lower elevation, the low marsh is usually underwater for many hours each day. Smooth cordgrass, which grows to five feet tall, is

1. Osprey
2. Shrimp
3. Striped Mullet
4. Nutrient Soup
5. Bottlenose Dolphin
6. Atlantic Blue Crab

The tide plays an important role in the life of a salt marsh. At high tide, water rushes in from the ocean, and the marsh seems quieted by the flood. But under the surface is a world of swirling sediment and microscopic plants and animals. This floating "soup" of nutrients nourishes a food web beginning with filter feeders like oysters and ending with larger predators like the bottlenose dolphin and osprey. At low tide, the marsh appears alive. While most large fish have gone with the tide, raccoons and other predators come to the dwindling tidal creeks to hunt.

1. Great Egret
2. Periwinkle Snail
3. Fiddler Crab
4. Raccoon
5. Oyster
6. Oyster "Bed"
7. Shrimp

Small areas of brackish marsh are frequently encountered along the edges of the high salt marsh. These areas, dominated by black needle rush, are slightly higher in elevation, allowing the saltwater to drain into the adjacent salt marsh.

Because of its low elevation, the low salt marsh is usually flooded for many hours each day.

Oyster beds or "rakes" support entire communities of plants and animals.

The Atlantic oyster drill, a small marine snail, preys on juvenile oysters.

the main plant found in this area of the marsh. It is extremely important in absorbing the impact of damaging storm waves, lessening their impact on the mainland. The dense roots of cordgrass hold the soil, give shelter to small animals and provide attachment sites for the Atlantic ribbed mussel. Two adaptations allow smooth cordgrass to survive the extended periods of saltwater flooding coupled with periods of drying. This plant excretes salt through its leaves, allowing it to maintain a specific internal salt concentration within its cells. It also contains air tubes that lead from the leaves to the roots to provide the roots with air during flooding.

Another habitat associated with the salt marsh is the salt flat. Salt flats are found in the highest sections of the marsh. The Russ Point boat landing adjacent to the boat ramp is an excellent place to observe a salt

flat. Flooding in these areas occurs only once a month, on the full moon. Plants are sparse in these areas because evaporation and the lack of daily tidal flushing create high salt concentration in the soil. Even though fresh water from rainfall slowly leaches some of the salt from these soils, only the most salt-tolerant plants such as glasswort, black needle-rush, salt marsh hay, sea lavender and batis can become established. These plants may take root in the salt flats, but they remain stunted because salt is always present.

Oyster beds are often visible at low tide in the waters of the salt marsh. These natural structures consist of living marine organisms, primarily the eastern oyster. They are formed as larval oysters settle on a solid surface. As the oysters mature, their shells provide attachment sites for additional oysters as well as sponges, marine worms and algae. As the beds grow, they form an entire community of plants and animals that includes cayenne keyhole limpets, eastern beaded chitons, black-fingered mud crabs, common sea stars, banded tulips and brown anemones. Also present is the Atlantic oyster drill, a small snail which preys on juvenile

Many interesting creatures can be observed along the Garden Hammock boardwalk which spans a portion of the salt marsh.

oysters. By using chemical and mechanical means, the snail drills a hole in the upper valve of the oyster to secure its meal.

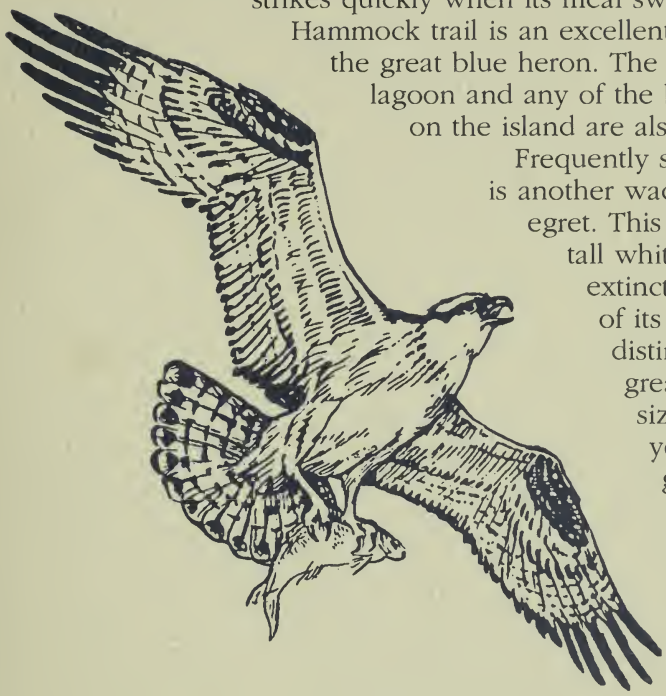
The wharf or friendly crab is often seen scurrying over the first few feet of the Garden Hammock boardwalk. This flat, square-shaped, brown crab

is common in Hunting Island's salt marsh. It prefers the higher areas of the marsh including areas above the high tide.

Rarely wandering far from salt or brackish water, the eastern diamondback terrapin may be found around tidal creeks and channels which are bordered by the smooth cordgrass. It is a dull-colored turtle with a shell that varies from gray to black. Its skin is dark and may have light spots or flecks.

The terrapin's tasty, succulent flesh was a favorite for soups in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. People often paid one dollar per inch for this turtle. The pressure exerted for its flesh almost lead to its extinction before changing tastes and hard financial times allowed its recovery.

Standing four feet tall, the great blue heron is the largest and most familiar heron in the area. It is a graceful blue-gray bird which also visits many freshwater areas. Its long legs allow it to wade in shallow water where it stands motionless fishing for its prey. The heron's dagger-like bill



strikes quickly when its meal swims past. The Garden Hammock trail is an excellent place for observing the great blue heron. The shallow waters of the lagoon and any of the bodies of fresh water on the island are also suitable.

Frequently seen in the salt marsh is another wading bird, the snowy egret. This beautiful two-foot tall white bird nearly became extinct because of the value of its plumes. It is easily distinguished from the great egret by its smaller size, black bill and yellow feet known as golden slippers. A wader like the great blue, it uses a different approach while hunting. With wings spread and flapping, the snowy egret dashes through the shallow water actively pursuing fish and other aquatic animals. It may also hover above the water, before it quickly descends upon an unsuspecting fish.

Rarely seen but often heard, the clapper rail, known locally as the marsh hen, is a year-round resident of the salt marsh. Preferring the safety of the thick growing cordgrass, it seldom wanders into view, except to make a quick meal of a few fiddler crabs.. A familiar loud "kek-kek-kek-kek-kek" call announces its presence.

Ospreys are often seen soaring over the waters of the salt marsh. This large brown and white bird of prey feeds almost exclusively on fish. It catches its meal by hovering over the water then plunging toward the water. At the last second the osprey will extend its feet forward into the water and grasp the prey. Osprey nests may be seen along the causeway to Fripp Island. The birds construct their nests on the top of telephone poles which have been provided for this purpose. The large bulky nests are made of sticks and are reused year after year.

Bald eagles are occasionally seen soaring over the salt marsh. This large brown bird, easily recognized by its "bald" white head and white tail, once nested on the island. Its diet consists mainly of fish which they either catch or steal from ospreys. They are also known to eat coots, herons and some mammals. Presently, the state's eagle population is low but steadily increasing. Perhaps someday they will return to Hunting Island to nest.

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